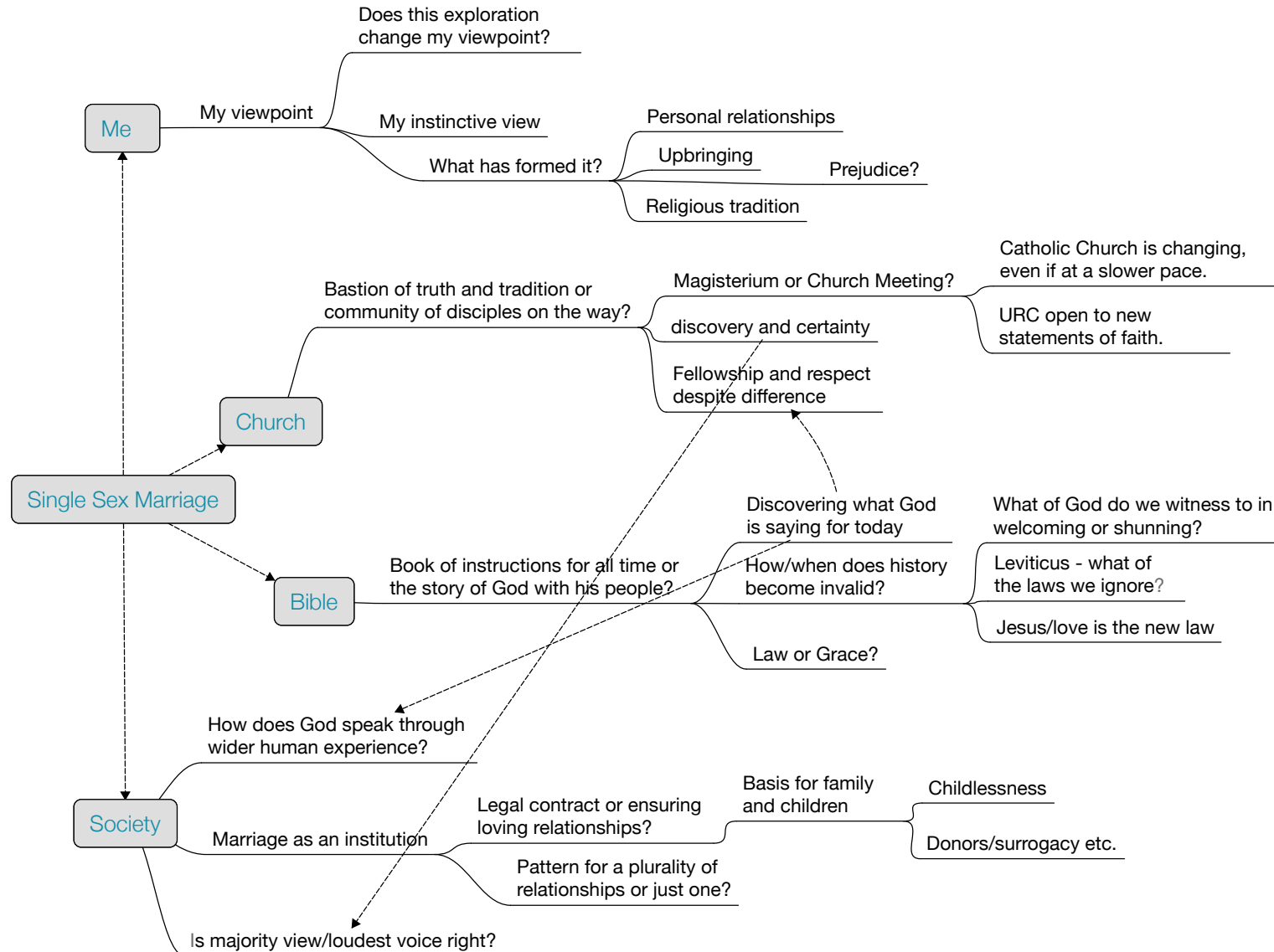


AN EXPLORATION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE WITHIN THE CHURCH



At its General Assembly in July 2016 the United Reformed Church resolved that its local churches could, if they so wished, register for the solemnisation of same-sex marriages. It is incumbent on the Church Meeting to reach a mind on whether they wish to do this, or not, as it would not be appropriate for any enquiry to be met with a response such as 'We don't know'.

Note: It may not necessarily follow that a serving minister shares the view of the church. If the minister cannot in all conscience conduct a same-sex marriage then the church would need to invite another minister to conduct the marriage.

There are many aspects to this exploration which Church Members are encouraged to consider, both individually and in groups. It is important that each part of the exploration includes prayer that through it the Lord will make his way and purpose known.

It is likely that contradictory views will be found even within ourselves as individuals. Group discussion is encouraged as a means for us, as individuals, to clarify our understanding as well as moving towards a shared view as a church.

The 'mindmap' outlines a range of issues that need to be considered as we seek God's mind in this matter. There are, no doubt, further issues that will arise in discussion.

ME

We, as individuals, are the starting point of this exploration. To begin, we need to be aware of what our instinctive view is of same-sex marriage and what the factors are that have led to this viewpoint.

At the conclusion it would be interesting to return to the matter of our personal viewpoint, although the real focus is to be what we believe to be God's way.

What is my instinctive view about same-sex marriage? What has formed this view?

Do I have different viewpoints on same-sex relationships, civil partnerships and marriage?

Friendship with people in same-sex relationships, family upbringing and religious views may all play their part. What are these?

CHURCH

This exploration is about the faith and practice of the Church, the community which will have helped to shape our view. As we are asked to frame a view as a particular congregation, it is worthwhile reflecting on the nature of this community.

Some will understand the Church as a bastion of faith and tradition which must be sustained.

Others will understand the Church as a community of disciples on the way, open to fresh revelations of God's way.

The Statement of the Nature Faith and Order of the URC gives expression to the second understanding, but what is your view?

Within the URC we recognise the central role of the Church Meeting, seeking God's way for a particular context and time, even though at times we might appreciate a Magisterium, such as the Roman Catholic Church, when faced with complex matters such as this.

The tensions between different viewpoints on same-sex marriage are a natural concern. Can we see differences being held together in respect and as part of the ongoing purpose of the wider Church to discern God's way?

BIBLE

The story of God's dealings with his people through history enabling a discovery of God's way in our own time - or a book within which we find definitive directives?

Detailed Old Testament law for particular contexts gives way to the Gospel law of love - prescription to grace. How do we make sense of this transition for our situation?

A same-sex couple seek marriage in church. What may they experience of God in welcome or shunning?

SOCIETY

It is cultural changes in society and legal changes with regard to marriage that persuade us to address this matter in relation to the Church. Scripture is the key resource for Christian faith, but we also recognise tradition. In what ways do we recognise God speaking through wider human experience (perhaps in challenge)? To what degree do we understand the Church as being 'in the world but not of the world'?

Our society works through democratic votes. In the URC this is also often our way of decision making. In the context of faith what do we make of 'the majority is right'?

How do we view the different views of marriage - legal contract and institution, expression of loving relationship and commitment, a calling of God? Is marriage the pattern for a plurality of relationships or just one?

What are the issues relating to marriage as a basis for family - childlessness/donors and surrogacy?